

Avian Influenza Fact Sheet

County of San Diego
Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory

What is avian influenza or “bird flu”?

“Bird flu” is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. Many different types of avian influenza occur naturally in wild birds. Most do not cause wild birds to become sick. Certain types can make wild birds and domesticated birds, such as chickens and turkeys, very sick. Infrequently avian influenza causes illness in humans and other animals. The “H5N1 virus” is a type of avian influenza that appeared in Asia during 2003. The “H5N1 virus” can cause illness in wild and domestic birds, and rarely people.



Does the virus spread easily from birds to humans?

No. Although more than 100 human cases have occurred globally in the current outbreak of “H5N1” avian influenza, this is a small number compared to the large number of sick birds and the many opportunities for people to get sick.

Can humans be infected with avian influenza viruses?

The risk to people from avian influenza is generally low. Direct contact with infected poultry or contaminated materials is the main route of human infection. Most human cases of avian influenza result from direct contact with infected poultry (e.g., domesticated chicken, ducks, and turkeys). No cases have occurred from contact with wild birds.

Is it safe to eat poultry and poultry products?

YES! Properly cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat.

Is it safe to own birds?

YES! Proper hygiene practices are critical for keeping pets birds and their owner’s safe.

How can birds be protected from avian influenza?

Biosecurity is the key to protecting pet birds. Biosecurity are the steps taken to protect your birds from diseases. For more information, go to the United States Department of Agriculture Web site “Biosecurity its for the Birds” at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/>

What are the symptoms of avian influenza in birds?

Illness can range from no symptoms to severe illness and death. Birds can have diarrhea, discharge from nose/eyes, be lethargic, fluffed, or suddenly die. If your bird is ill, see your veterinarian since many other diseases can cause these same symptoms.

How is avian influenza spread in birds?

Birds become sick from contact with saliva, discharge from nose or eyes, and feces secreted from infected birds. These materials can also contaminate surfaces (such as dirt or cages), food and water. These materials can also make birds sick.

How are birds tested for avian influenza?

Live birds can be tested by your veterinarian. Dead birds can be tested by the San Diego County Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory.

What if I find a dead bird?

Call San Diego County Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at (858) 694-2838 or Dead Bird Hotline at 1-888-551-INFO (4636).

What is the County of San Diego doing about avian influenza?

The San Diego County Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory is testing all birds submitted to the laboratory for avian influenza. County Veterinarian has prepared an Avian Influenza Emergency Plan in addition to working closely with human and animal health partners.

References

For general information about avian influenza and pandemic flu go to www.pandemicflu.gov
For global information on avian influenza, see the World Health Organization (WHO) Web site at www.who.int